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ABSTRACT

The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association recently released language arts standards. California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) has been engaged in collaborative projects with local school districts in two counties (Los Angeles and Orange). This paper highlights CSULB's efforts with language arts standards. If national standards are to be assessed effectively, there must be significant local control in how the standards are interpreted and implemented as well as local purveyance in designing assessment procedures. Part of the work with the school districts has been to better prepare students in language arts/literacy. University faculty and school teachers collaborate to provide enhanced experiences for preservice teachers. University students in composition participate in composition tutorials, field experiences, and methods classes. They are also involved in developing standards and portfolios through collaborative activities. The teacher education program trains teachers to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment; to be aware of issues involved in this alignment; and to identify alternative paths of assessment. To work with standards-based teacher education, there must be public school interest in the efforts. School and university faculty must be knowledgeable about standards and willing to collaborate. There must be a mutually agreed upon student teaching component and other field experiences so student teachers benefit from their training. (Contains 15 references.) (SM)

The Implications of Standards-Based Reform: The Local Level

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Abstract

Although both liberals and conservatives have opposed the standards movement, educational standards are front and center of the American political educational agenda. One primary question persists about who will determine the standards. One source is the national professional associations. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) recently released Language Arts Standards. Yet a larger and more complex question looms, and that is what are the implications -- particularly at local levels -- of standard-based reform? The mere formulation of the Standards as a public statement recognizes the lack of agreement on what the language arts mean today and the lack of alignment among the various levels and institutions of schooling across the country.

Yet, since local contexts are where reform issues and attendant problems regarding this shift to a new form of literacy are played out, we use our campus as a representative case. California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) has been engaged in collaborative projects with local school districts in two counties (Los Angeles and Orange). We were recently awarded a CAPP (California Academic Partnership Program) Planning Grant in which we identified four goals; one was to enhance pre-service experiences for better teacher preparation for public education. A second goal was to provide professional development for more effective composition (and mathematics) instruction. In the third goal we sought to align composition (and mathematics) standards, curriculum, and assessment between secondary schools and higher education to reduce the need for remediation. And in the fourth, we developed collaborative policies which can serve as a statewide

model to ensure that standards, curriculum, assessment, professional development, and teacher preparation remain effectively aligned between K-12 and higher education. The discussion presented here focuses the work done in composition, particularly as it relates to preservice teacher education.

The Implications of Standards-Based Reform:

The Local Level

Educational standards are currently front and center of the American political and educational agenda. The standards movement is growing in strength so that seventy-five per cent of people surveyed support higher standards even though only five per cent identify low standards as the most serious problem for public education ("Educational Standards," 1996). National standards are at the heart of Clinton's educational reform, although both liberals and conservatives have opposed the standards movement due partly to concerns over who controls these standards since in the United States there is a long history of local control of schools. Nevertheless, though arguments for local control include being able to accommodate a wide variety of individuals with diverse needs and backgrounds, those who want state or national standards maintain there must be higher standards, ones which are more universal and which emphasize specific content and skills, so that all students in the United States are receiving at least some education in common. Kirst (1994) credits four sources for the move to nationwide education standards: (1) lack of adequate standards; (2) low level of standardized tests; (3) misleading results; and (4) lack of incentives. They are a beginning for subsequent state and local policy alignment of textbooks, assessment, staff development, categorical programs, and accreditation.

There are critical questions raised about the effects of standards-based assessment, regardless of who determines the standards. Shepard and Bliem (1995) maintain that the backlash against standards-based assessment comes partly from parents who feel there is too much emphasis on self-esteem, too little attention to skills in whole-language instruction, and concern

that students would not be prepared for high-stakes tests like the SAT. Jervis and McDonald (1996) refer to standards as "the philosophical monster in the classroom" while Angelo (1996) maintains that standards, because they must be collegially determined, should be established in higher education for admissions, general education, majors, and graduation requirements; and that these standards and the concomitant assessment should be reflected in the syllabi, evaluation, and grading of the courses that embody the curriculum. Thus, although there is much disagreement over who shall set standards, and ever if there will be standards, it is generally agreed that standards are a moving force in reform agendas (Linn, 1994; Corcoran and Goetz, 1995).

One source of the standards is the national professional associations, composed of teachers and researchers, which have sought to identify consensually determined standards. These organizations are the source of many of the standards which are widely accepted and also widely rejected. The standards proposed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics have already been widely influential and are part of what Lewis (1994) refers to as standards which have led to upheaval. They have had wide influence on mathematics textbooks, curriculum, policy, and instruction in California, as well as in other states. Cohen (1995) argues that only part of the problem associated with standards can really be linked to them. The rest of the controversy is linked to the lack of a common language and a misguided insistence that standards will define education, not merely illuminate it.

English Language Arts Standards

Regardless of one's position on the role of standards, it is difficult not to acknowledge that standards have had a powerful influence on schools, teachers, and professional development.

What has been less explored is their effect on teacher education. The primary purpose of this discussion is to explore the interaction among standards, professional development, teacher education, and higher education (e.g., remediation).

Recently the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) released its Language Arts Standards. The Standards were the product of about four years of intensive work by representatives from these two large national organizations. On the surface this event may not seem momentous; in fact, it might be argued that specifying standards is really a political response to the federal government and to critics who are calling for educators to be accountable for what students are supposed to be learning. Still critics find the Standards vague, too general, and therefore unhelpful in really telling the public what every student should be able to do with the English language.

Yet, while the political history of the Standards document forms its own interesting tale of who owns English, the fact that two national organizations found the work important enough to continue, even after the federal government pulled out its financial support for the project (Standards, 1996), suggests that the document's architects felt it was in the best interests of the profession to state publicly what they believe essential to skilled performances in literacy. In this sense, such a public proclamation of disciplinary identity resembles a political party's platform statement detailing the organization's goals, beliefs, and values. Its mere formulation as public statement recognizes the lack of agreement on what the language arts mean today and lack of alignment among the various levels of education (and the institutions in which they are situated) across the country. Whatever vagueness the document embodies is calculated to allow for

local interpretation and control while simultaneously proclaiming nationally fundamental principles and values about what the profession should be doing to better prepare a literate population.

The NCTE/IRA document lists three "beliefs" upon which its standards are based:

1) The need to prepare better our students for the technologically complex society of the present and the rapidly changing future;

2) The inclusion of multiple constituencies concerned with literacy and language arts, including teachers, researchers, teacher educators, and parents so that expectations for student achievement and routes to this achievement can be mutually determined; and

3) The standards level the playing field and help reduce disparities in expectations by expecting the same from all students. All students are expected to "become informed citizens and participate fully in society" (4).

This statement of purpose acknowledges the new demands of a technologically complex workplace. It also insists that all students shall have the opportunity to learn what they need to succeed. There is tacit agreement expressed here concerning the disparity in the quality of schools nationwide and mixed perceptions on what a language arts curriculum should look like. These disparities and different perceptions, however, are interconnected to radical shifts in the country's demographics and to gross inequalities in the distribution of wealth.

Although not explicitly identified, what also emerges from a close reading of these Standards is what Miles Myers, the Executive Director of NCTE and one of the document's primary authors, calls a new "translation/critical literacy." The Standards document embodies the

shift from an older decoding/analytic literacy to this new literacy, which is distinguished by a multifaceted, highly contextualized use of language. Students need to be able to translate language from one form to another, adapt and craft their language to fit different audiences and contexts in order to realize a variety of purposes, use alternative representational systems for encoding meaning, and recognize that intelligence is distributed across various groups and technologies so individuals must rely on one another to accomplish complex tasks and projects. Still each person within these networks of distributed intelligence need to possess some understanding of how the entire system functions. Hence the new literacy requires collaboration and teamwork, with the recognition that one accepts the limits to one's o .n knowledge but also knows where to go for help. Translation/critical literacy also requires students to develop a reflective critical stance whereby people use literacy skills to reflect on what they know in order to continue to learn and to be more effective in situations where strategic uses of language confer power (Myers, 1996).

A statement of standards now is a recognition of this new literacy and simultaneously a pledge of allegiance that it will eventually prevail over earlier forms, which Myers (1996) claims continue to thrive often in conflict with one another. We note this conflict : use most current 'standardized tests reflect the older decoding/analytic literacy where students read short, decontextualized passages and answer questions about vocabulary and meaning. The Standards al:o reflect the com, 'exity and holistic nature of the language arts as well as the belief that all uses of language are contextual and partake of individual performances within culturally coded situations. The document recognizes the impact of technology and the concomitant

explosion of information requiring very different sorts of literate strategies needed in order to cope with this influence.

The Standards document therefore illustrates a curious irony: This new literacy cannot be translated into normed multiple choice tests that measure decoding skills. Yet the document is a national statement identifying essential language skills. The NCTE and IRA have strategically offered a version of a new literacy which simultaneously builds upon, as it goes beyond, an older, outdated decoding/analytic literacy yet offers a literacy that cannot be measured according to assessment instruments designed for an older version. A distressing problem for critics of the document is precisely that this new literacy cannot be measured in an efficient, reliable manner. Where multiple choice tests on decontextualized passages and impromptu writing were the staple of decoding/analytic literacy, the new literacy requires complex, multidimensional performances as its means of assessment. Consequently, where standardized tests were the staple of decoding/analytic literacy, portfolios are representative of translation/critical literacy. However, critics perceive the inability to assess through nationally normed, empirical means as still another indication that English teachers do not want to be accountable for their work in the classroom.

So we have a dilemma: National standards act both as a guide and as a heuristic for thinking about and designing reform in local contexts; yet if these national standards are to be assessed effectively, there will need to be an even greater amount of local control in how these standards are interpreted and put into practice as well as local purveyance in designing assessment procedures. The Language Arts document attempts to institutionalize this new literacy; still, the

nature of this new literacy makes it a matter of principle that no national assessment is possible because of the variability of skilled literate performances.

How is it possible then to insure that our students achieve the national standards, but do so in individually various ways and in a diversity of contexts? It is a crucial question, of course, because standards that cannot be assessed en masse can never offer the reassurance to legislators and critics of education they were meant to assuage -- or at the least to address the critics' concerns. Yet a larger issue looms which encompasses the assessment issue: The national standards signal a major shift in what it means to be "literate" in today's -- and tomorrow's -- world. This shift produces discernible tension throughout our educational institutions where conflicts of interpretation over what literacy is, how it should be taught, and how evaluated are played out, not only at the national level and in the popular press, but at the state and local levels, at faculty meetings, at meetings of the PTA, and perhaps most saliently, during lunch in the faculty lounge where friendly chatter can turn to burning silence when colleagues express fundamentally opposed views that are irreconcilable.

Statement of the Problem

Since local contexts are where reform issues and attendant problems regarding this shift to a new literacy are played out, we will use our campus as a representative case. At California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), approximately two-thirds of entering first-year students are underprepared as determined by the statewide English Placement test. What this means is that although these students are admitted based on high school GPAs and transcripts of courses taken, their placement test scores indicate they are not ready for college-level work. These students are

forced to enroll in at least one, and many for two, semesters of pre-baccalaureate composition courses, and they must pass each of these courses before they can move on, either to the next level course or to the required credit-bearing composition course.

Long Beach is not an anomaly in this regard. Most of the southern California campuses within the California State University system are averaging about 60-80% of students testing in as underprepared.[1] The Trustees of the CSU have called for a phasing out of "remediation" within the next ten years. The thrust of their recommendations is that university faculty should work more closely with high schools to better prepare students for college-level work. The Trustees' call aroused some skepticism since a 1984 proposal with similar goals produced no discernible change in the situation; in fact, since 1989 when more accurate tracking of the numbers began, the need for remediation has only worsened (LA Times, 1995). Nothing was done to ensure that university and high school faculties would (and could) collaborate since time and resources were not allocated for such work. Nor have such allocations been made this time.

Partly in response to these demands, California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), has been engaged in collaborative projects with local school districts in two counties (Los Angeles and Orange). We were recently awarded a CAPP (California Academic Partnership Program) Planning Grant[2] to achieve additional collaboration to address priority needs in four areas within two school districts. One of these school districts is Long Beach Unified with which CSULB participates in the Long Beach Community Partnership. The four priority areas are as follows: (1) to align mathematics and composition standards, curriculum, and assessment between secondary schools and higher education to reduce the need for remediation; (2) to

provide professional development for more effective composition and mathematics instruction; (3) to enhance pre-service experiences for better teacher preparation for public education; and (4) to develop collaborative policies which can serve as a statewide model to ensure that standards, curriculum, assessment, professional development and teacher preparation remain effectively aligned between K-12 and higher education.

We will limit our discussion here to the work done in composition. Of direct interest are the University faculty involved in the proficiency examinations in writing; high school English teachers; the English Education faculty; and administrators in teacher education. University campus-level administration and public school leadership, including superintendents, principals, and curriculum specialists.

There were immediate results of our receiving the CAPP Planning Grant. The partners explored a range of collaborative possibilities to achieve these four goals. First, the participants identified specific ways and a timeline for producing consensually understood and consistently implemented curriculum and assessment standards for admission and placement for university mathematics and composition. The composition faculty had worked closely with the English teachers and curriculum coordinator and standards were already established through Grade 10. They continued discussion on portfolio assessment as an alternate to the entry level writing test and began to work on the standards for Grades 11 and 12.

Second, professional development needs of K-12 teachers were identified related to such topics as portfolios and authentic assessment; alignment of curriculum and assessment; collaborative learning; metacognitive strategies; small-group instruction; transfer of learning; and

activities and materials to increase student motivation. Faculty from all institutions determined that meeting together was productive and that the dialogue helped them understand common goals and student problems. A **Seamless Education Conference** was funded by CSULB through the College of Liberal Arts, supported strongly by the College of Education. Four hundred participants met one afternoon and evening to discuss articulation and assessment; the keynote address was given by Katie Haycock of AAHE's Education Trust. She emphasized strongly the need for such collaboration; the strengths of working with standards-based education; and the problems students face when institutions are not aligned with respect to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This conversation was designed to include community college participants, too, so that students have multiple routes for access to higher education and so that faculties may learn from each other. The beginning of collegial relations, common goals, and a common language to address common problems, were the most valuable outcomes of the planning grant period for classroom teachers. They continually expressed their satisfaction with meeting with University faculty and their desire for continued interaction. University faculty were relieved to find that their K-12 counterparts wanted to work with them for student success and higher achievement. The dialogue is continuing past the planning grant period; a summer "workshop" is planned to bring together the teacher education faculty and district personnel so that the teacher education component is more fully realized.

Third, opportunities to link university students with field experiences in teacher preparation were identified so that students could have a better understanding of the teaching profession, better synthesize academic material, and learn more team-oriented approaches to

instruction. Four high schools are participating. Faculty in composition were working together before the planning grant period. The English faculty were selected because of their excellence in teaching and subject matter, and at least two of the teachers were participants in the South Basin Writing Project. The English Education program is quite large with approximately 70 students a year earning a Single Subject Teaching Credential in English. Students in this program participate in the public schools in several of their courses, meet a subject matter assessment through a portfolio evaluated by public school and University faculty, and enjoy a favorable placement rate in the public schools. This is an extremely popular program and there are students who cannot be accommodated because of the lack of funds. Thus, many student teachers regularly participate in the public schools and the English Education faculty enjoy a positive, strong relationship with the public schools. One of the faculty who regularly teaches and supervises student teachers is also the Director of the South Basin Writing Project, and the composition person working on the planning grant is the Co-Director of the Freshman Composition Program. He has been working with the Seamless Education efforts of the Partnership for the last year.

Thus, University students in composition will come from three courses and from student teaching. They will participate in a composition tutorial, in the prerequisite field experience, and in the methods class. They will be involved in the development of standards and portfolios through the collaborative activities. Moreover, preservice students are included on the cutting edge of school practice and collaboration. They are being given help in team activities and team building. Since the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing is an essential part of

the English Language-Arts Standards and the California Language Arts Framework, the preservice teachers should see classrooms with this emphasis as well as experience University coursework with this same focus. Since generations of students have been instructed in discrete skills and the separation of reading, writing, thinking, and speaking, it will be important to note the preservice teachers' own training in high school (and earlier) and their response to the new curricula and instructional strategies. Wilson (1990) found that teachers' ability to enact a mathematics curriculum (as specified in the Framework) was constrained by their knowledge of mathematics and their need for help in learning new teaching strategies, as well as the time needed to understand the enactment, seek resources, and incorporate them into their daily teaching routines. It is assumed that this will also be the case with preservice English teachers, so it will be necessary to note what training and/or characteristics of the student teacher facilitates or makes harder successful teaching in these classrooms. Since the focus will be on the standards, we will need to examine closely how student teachers respond to this emphasis.

Fourth, participants identified activities and policies to be implemented permanently to ensure that curriculum, standards, and assessment practices remain aligned and support student achievement. Realizing these goals will involve long-term activities and the development and implementation of policies which support these activities, goals, and outcomes.

During the planning grant period, high school teachers made clear to those of us at the University that they do not know what "we" want to see their students be able to do. They want direction, examples of acceptable student work, scoring rubrics, and the chance to converse regularly with university faculty. In short they want to collaborate. Yet with rigid fixed

schedules on both sides (although University faculty have more leeway here) and with resources already budgeted, there seems little chance of any meaningful or productive collaboration to occur. Of course, there are pockets of collaboration and interaction; yet there can be little or no systemic change without widescale involvement. However, the planning grant period has given us an opportunity to identify problems and formulate solutions.

Teacher Education and the Standards Movement

We have outlined where our institution is in terms of the standards movement. There is no question but that our involvement with standards-based reform has had, and continues to have, an effect on our work. Specifically, there has been an effect on our work with teacher education. Although changes have come about in our own thinking and in our reflective practice, we also see changes that are more systemic in our teacher education program, both at the level of the subject matter preparation program and the professional education work. Several changes have come about this year. They cannot all be directly linked to the standards movement, but they are taking place within the context described above.

One change which has occurred is the movement toward portfolio assessment in the subject matter program and its development in the professional education work. Students who want to be teachers must demonstrate subject matter mastery by successfully completing course requirements and portfolio assessment. The portfolio assessment in subject matter was implemented this year. Students are assigned a public school teacher as mentor. These mentors have been selected from Cooperating/Master teachers and members of the English Education Advisory Committee. They work with students to assemble the portfolio, to select pieces for

inclusion, and to give feedback on its content. The portfolios themselves are evaluated jointly by University faculty and K-12 teachers. Students are given an opportunity to rewrite their portfolios if they do not receive high enough scores to pass the review the first time. They must demonstrate subject area knowledge through papers, reviews, and other assignments; and demonstrate a basic understanding of pedagogical content knowledge through inclusion of lesson plans and original artifacts. At this point, the portfolio is being developed within the professional work to bring forward part of the subject matter portfolio, include work from courses, and ultimately from the student teaching experience.

Second, faculty discussions examine the importance of multiple assessments, what can be learned from portfolios, and how portfolios and other forms of authentic assessment model for our students how these various forms can be effectively used to evaluate student performances. One new faculty member in English Education was employed this year; his area of expertise is portfolio use in student teaching. His interest in this area was one of his strengths, and he will assume an active role in the preparation of English candidates. Since he is teaching one section of the English methods course in the Fall, assessment as issue and as practice will become an important topic in the program; its alignment to curriculum and instruction will be emphasized. This experience in the methods course should model for future student teachers the use of portfolios, issues associated with them, and how one includes the portfolio in high stakes assessment. Since one goal of the standards movement is also to develop portfolios in the high school which can be used to demonstrate writing competence at the University level, there are common and parallel goals which should complement each other.

Third, one primary goal of our teacher education program is to train teachers to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment; to be aware of the issues involved in this alignment; and to identify alternative paths of assessment. This movement to portfolios should positively affect the teacher education program. Portfolios as assessment will be embedded within the structure of the program so that systemic change is an inevitable outcome. There is already change in the methods course. There is also planned change in the prerequisite course to the program. This Spring the prerequisite course was changed from 2 to 3 units to accommodate three emphases, one of which is the introduction of the portfolio; the second of which is a thorough introduction to middle school education in the English language arts; and the third of which is the introduction of crosscultural and language development issues. The intent here is to focus on interdisciplinary learning and integrated curriculum, especially an integrated curriculum in English language arts.

Because of the influence of the professional organizations, the standards movement has made teachers aware of the shift in expectations for all students. It is, of course, important whether or not a district is implementing standards-based curriculum or not. However, some departments are developing standards in response to their own needs because they see standards as an opportunity to rethink and re-evaluate what they are doing. Standards provide the starting point for discussion. It is becoming increasingly important that student teachers (and earlier field experience students) be active participants in these discussions since it is here that the school's direction may be determined. It is most important that they identify and evaluate how this direction was determined. Why did the teachers decide on the focus that they did decide upon? What influenced them? What other decisions could have been made? It is frequently difficult

for student teachers to understand the mutability of what knowledge is critical for success. Indeed, they may be part of a faculty where knowledge is not seen as mutable, where it is not agreed that language is contextualized, and where standardized tests are believed to be reliable and valid "tests" of students' knowledge. It is important that student teachers understand this process, the questions and solutions that are arrived at, and that they begin their professional careers with a concrete understanding of the important questions linked to English language arts education.

The Future

We think it is critical that our readers understand the scope of involvement necessary to work with standards-based teacher education. First, there must be public school interest in standards-based education. Second, faculties from K-12 and from the university must be knowledgeable about standards and willing to collaborate. Third, there must be a mutually agreed upon student teaching component as well as other field experiences in the student teaching program so that preservice teachers benefit from their training.

It is important for those who want to begin work with standards-based programs to realize that they do not occur quickly or without support. The benefit for the student is primarily that the student teaching program and field experiences are not isolated experiences. They are linked conceptually to each other and the University and K-12 institutions are linked through the work with standards. Preservice and inservice teachers can both benefit, but establishing these programs are time consuming and demanding, particularly in the area of the scarce resources of faculty time. However, if we want to be on the cutting-edge of teacher education programs, we

must be knowledgeable about standards-based programs and make our decisions to establish them or not based on the benefit to all of our students and to our faculties.

1. The Los Angeles Times most recent report indicates that of the Southern California Cal State campuses, the percentages of students testing in as "remedial" in English are 81.4% at the Los Angeles campus, 74.7% at Dominguez Hills, 69.7% at Northridge, and Long Beach comes in just under 60% at 58.2% (*Los Angeles Times*, 1996, A1+).

2. The CAPP Planning Grant was co-authored by David Dowell and Ruth Knudsen.

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